

## The Cause of Ovid's Exile

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All the world loves a mystery, for behind a mystery may lie enough romance and adventure to gratify even the wildest imagination, whereas the clear and self-explanatory becomes all too often dull and boring. The assassination of President Kennedy, though the subject of an investigation conducted with unparalleled intensity, will — at least for some — remain a mystery forever, though for others it is no mystery at all. Casting our minds back over history we shall have no difficulty in adducing other examples of this phenomenon, namely the rejection of a simple and straightforward explanation not so much in favor of an alternative as for the acceptance of a permanent state of uncertainty, from which disappointment is banished and in which the powers of the imagination are perpetually nourished by evergreen hopes and speculations.

### *Ovid's exile no mystery*

Description of Ovid's exile as a mystery is universal, and inasmuch as there is no agreement about the effective clause of the indictment, the word cannot be censured. In his survey of the problem Thibault found himself forced to conclude, after cataloguing a remarkably large number of hypotheses, that "none is completely satisfactory."<sup>1</sup> Thus, before we have even begun to examine any of the evidence, we are tempted to form a prejudice that the mystery felt by modern scholars is a genuine mystery, handed down by tradition from Ovid's own times.

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<sup>1</sup>John C. Thibault, *The Mystery of Ovid's Exile* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1964), p. 121.

However, in his autobiographical poem, *Trist.* 4. 10, Ovid says quite categorically: "The cause of my ruin, only too well known to everyone, is not to be revealed by evidence of mine":

Causa meae cunctis nimium quoque nota ruinae  
indicio non est testificanda meo. (vv. 99-100)

Everyone at Rome knew the reason, says Ovid, almost as though it were superfluous for him to specify what it was and perhaps shame himself in the eyes of posterity. Now, if Ovid's sin were generally known, we cannot take the position that it was something frightfully hush-hush and that he carried to the grave through long years in exile a secret potentially dangerous to Augustus. Not but what this position is occasionally taken: "What everyone knew," says Hollis, "was merely that Ovid had offended the emperor."<sup>2</sup> But surely Ovid is more specific than this? The natural interpretation of the couplet is that, though the offense could not tactfully be discussed in public, everyone knew what it was. Again, Ovid writes at *Pont.* I. 7. 39-40: "Just as I wish I could deny my guilt, so too everyone knows (*nemo nescit*) that mine was no crime." The couplet patently means that the effective cause of Ovid's banishment was widely known.

Another consideration we must bear in mind is that the only evidence we have is that of Ovid himself. He is hardly a disinterested witness. Besides possessing phenomenal rhetorical skill — his poems are full of examples in which he presents a situation from two contrary points of view — he was after all fighting a determined battle for reinstatement, for him virtually a battle for life itself. Moreover, he is quite capable of totally misleading us, as when he says he burnt the *Metamorphoses*, or that this poem lacks the finishing touches.<sup>3</sup> He is quite capable of sheer romancing, as when he tells us of poems he composed in the Getic tongue.<sup>4</sup> Tomis was no doubt bleak and joyless for the outcast, but his description of the landscape and environment would never suggest the fact that tourists today flock there in large numbers.

It is perhaps not surprising, though for our enquiry it is most unfortunate, that we have no early imperial notice of Ovid's banishment. But I think we must accept this as devoid of significance; we are in like case with Catullus, about whom there is not a word in Cicero.

<sup>2</sup>A. S. Hollis, *Ovid, Ars Amatoria, Book I* (Oxford 1977), p. xiv, n. 2.

<sup>3</sup>*Trist.* I. 7. 14, 20. The lie is given to these assertions by Ovid himself, in verse 24, in his admission that the poem (hardly then incomplete) had been transcribed in numerous copies.

<sup>4</sup>*Pont.* IV. 13. 19-22 (in contrast to *Trist.* V. 10. 35-42).

No doubt Suetonius gave some colorful version (perhaps even the truth) in his *De Poetis*, but it has not survived. We are left with Ovid's uncorroborated statements. Still, we need not be too eager to disbelieve him. Indeed, inasmuch as he is appealing for help from influential Romans who would readily have detected fundamental misstatements of fact, his unequivocal testimony on basic matters ought to be reliable. Where, on the other hand, he is evasive or ambiguous or appears to take shelter in vague or cryptic utterance, there we should be on our guard. As I have argued earlier, Ovid was not in possession of a secret which threatened Augustus. How could the latter have tolerated this? It would have been so easy for him to contrive Ovid's suicide. Certainly, to banish the most articulate of living Romans to a place beyond instant control and from which he could, and did, send a spate of missives to Rome was no way to keep his mouth shut.

### *Ovid's early publications*

The inquiry will best begin with a brief review of Ovid's career up to the time of his disgrace. He was born of an old and wealthy equestrian family in 43 B.C., studied rhetoric at Rome and Athens, and made as if to devote himself to a political career; but his virtuosity as poet beckoned him in a different direction, and in early manhood he made the decision to abandon all other callings and dedicate himself full-time to the Muses.

From about 20 B.C., for over two decades, Ovid poured forth with uninterrupted regularity a series of elegiac works that far surpassed anything ever previously attempted in their open mockery of accepted sexual morality. When we reflect that Ovid's wit was as smart as Oscar Wilde's, and his genius in creating elegiac music out of the Latin language positively Mozartian, we can hardly be surprised that at the end of this period he had established himself as Rome's foremost poet, and was the idol of the capital.

The *Amores*, originally in five books, probably published at the rate of a book a year, were completed by about 15 B.C. His tragedy, *Medea* (now lost), may have been next (or if it was not, it was at any rate an early work); and certainly there followed the *Heroides* (I mean the single poems 1-15), which takes us up to about 5 B.C.

In thus talking of Ovid's output over the period 20 B.C. - 5 B.C., I ought to issue a caveat about the terms 'publication' and 'edition'; even

so authoritative a scholar as Syme<sup>5</sup> talks of 'publication' and 'edition' as if Ovid's work was brought out by Harper & Row or the Oxford University Press. The reality must have been very different: a clue to the meaning of book-production at this time may be found in the nature of his *Medea*, which was closer to Senecan than to early republican tragedy. Ovid recited his poems at soirées in salons, and recitations must to some extent have served as publication. Assuredly they gained him considerable publicity; he boasts of being the talk of Rome, and there is no reason to disbelieve him. As for second editions, they seem to have been remarkably few in antiquity: *nescit vox missa reverti*. We cannot say that because of the change of dedication the six books of the *Fasti* which we have constitute a revised edition, for that work was never issued as a first: indeed, it was never completed, and what we have of it was not given to the world until after the poet's death. Even the so-called second edition of the *Amores*, that which we have, containing three books rather than five (according to the prefatory epigram), may not have involved re-writing, merely the suppression of some excessively shocking poems that had amused when heard but given offense when read.

From 1 B.C. to A.D. 2 there burst upon Rome the wittiest and naughtiest of Ovid's compositions: first, in 1 B.C., Books I and II of the *Ars Amatoria* (The Playboy's Handbook: Book I: Where to find your girl and how to seduce her; Book II: How to keep her). A year or two later came an afterthought, Book III (Advice to Playgirls), and hard on its heels a kind of mock-recantation, the *Remedia Amoris* (How, having fallen in love, to fall out of it).

It is a pity we cannot be more precise about the dates, for it was in 2 B.C. that Julia, the emperor's own daughter, was accused by him of immoral conduct and summarily banished. The senators were not suffered to remain in ignorance of the details; Augustus saw to it that documentary evidence of her numerous affairs was read out to them. In view of what is to come, it is noteworthy that, for several years after Julia had been visited with such condign punishment, Ovid's scandalous series of publications should issue forth without abatement and without attracting censure. And this will be no less true if with Syme and others we fancy that the *Ars Amatoria* was first produced several years earlier, say between 9 and 6 B.C. In either case, Augustus missed a splendid opportunity of proceeding against Ovid at the time of his daughter's banishment. Syme's chief reason is that the passage in *Ars Amatoria* I dealing with the Sea-battle and the digression on the

<sup>5</sup>Ronald Syme, *History in Ovid* (Oxford 1978), Chapter I (pp. 1-20).

Parthian War of Gaius Caesar (which fixes the date firmly at 1 B.C.) is an insertion. The suggestion of a second edition is resisted by Hollis,<sup>6</sup> and I am sure he is right. Self-contained episodes may throw light on the order of composition, but external evidence is needed to justify theories of separate editions. Why, the Laocoon episode in *Aeneid* II is universally conceded to be a careful insertion by Virgil, but no one has ever argued that *Aeneid* II was published in an early edition before Virgil's death.

Syme also conjectures that between the first two books of the *Ars Amatoria* and Book III there intervened the second edition of the *Amores* and what he calls the final edition of the *Heroides* (i.e. with the addition of 16-21).<sup>7</sup> Nothing could be more improbable than that Ovid interrupted his composition of the *Ars Amatoria* for other compositions; and that *Heroides* 16-21 were not so produced can be definitively proved.

Propertius left an indelible mark on Latin elegiac verse composition by his gradual progression towards ending every pentameter with a word of two syllables. In his first book the proportion of disyllabic endings is 63.7%; in the second 89.4%; in the third 97.6%; and in the fourth 98.7%. Whatever we may feel about the aesthetics of this principle, there can be no doubt that Ovid regarded it — for whatever reason — as mandatory. So much so that in all his early work, from the *Amores* to the *Remedia Amoris*, that is in nearly 4,500 pentameters, there is not one single pentameter which ends with a polysyllabic word.

In his *Fasti*, which he was working on when he was exiled, however, there are two polysyllabic endings; in *Heroides* 16-21 there are three; and in the exilic poems (nearly 3,700 pentameters) there are 48.<sup>8</sup> What does this mean? Why should a virtuoso poet who sets up an invariable rule continue to observe it, but only for 99% of the time? One can understand an artist making a clean break with a principle, but it is less easy to fathom a clearly perceptible but infinitesimal relaxation of that principle. At any rate, if (as I now accept) Ovid is the author of *Heroides* 16-21, he composed them during or after his work on the *Metamorphoses*. To place them between *Ars* II and *Ars* III is simply a blind guess, and a wrong one.

<sup>6</sup>Hollis (above, note 2), p. xiii (and on 171).

<sup>7</sup>Syme (above, note 5), p. 20.

<sup>8</sup>*Fast.* V. 582 *fluminibus*, VI. 660 *funeribus*; *Her.* 16. 288 *puclitiae*; 17. 16 *superciliis*; 19. 202 *deseruit*; *Ibis* 506 *Berecyniades*, 518 *historiae*; *Tristia* 15 instances (.85%), all quadrisyllables or pentasyllables like I. 3. 6 *Ausoniae* and II. 212 *adulterii*; *Ex Ponto* 31 instances (1.94%), of similar type (except for I. 1. 66 *non faciet*; I. 6. 26 *scelus est*; I. 8. 40

To return to Ovid's poetic career. It is A.D. 2. The elder Julia is languishing in exile, and the poet, having exhausted erotic elegy, turns to new literary endeavors. Over the next several years he is busied with the composition (which to some extent must have overlapped) of the *Metamorphoses* and the *Fasti*. Certainly he had not completed the latter work when in A.D. 8 (a date on which all agree) the blow fell.

### *Ovid's relegation*

In *Pont.* II. 3, written to his close friend Cotta Maximus several years afterwards, he relives the awful memory of that occasion. He was staying with his friend on the island of Elba when a messenger arrived bringing Ovid a summons back to Rome, probably — though this is not quite certain — to face Augustus in person. Ovid at once knew that he was in deep trouble, and at first denied the charge to Cotta; but his fear at what awaited him in Rome, and his eagerness to enlist Cotta's active help, soon compelled him to confess that he was implicated. From this passage we can be sure that some recent serious event had occurred and that Ovid had a sufficiently guilty conscience to refer to his part in it as *culpae mala fama meae* "the ill-repute of my sin" (v. 86).

Clearly this something was not the publication of the *Ars Amatoria* a decade earlier. There is no suggestion in Ovid's account that he was astonished at the charge, no suggestion that he was unjustly or erroneously accused, no suggestion that he had only involuntarily witnessed the crime of another or others. Indeed, earlier in the poem he recalls that Cotta's anger with him was as intense as Augustus's. But Cotta's anger, so he alleges, gradually subsided, and, with growing feelings of sympathy, he pondered the possibility of Ovid's being pardoned as a first offender. Although the poet is careful not to give the slightest clue to the nature of the charge (except that it must have been serious), he has admitted that he was guilty.

Back in Rome, Ovid seems to have appeared before Augustus, who conducted a trial *in camera*. From a remark the poet lets drop (*Trist.* II. 133-34) we gather that he was given a fierce verbal castigation, at the end of which he was commanded to leave the country by a certain date and henceforth to live at Tomis, at the very end, if not of the world, at least of the Roman Empire. The sentence was announced to the public by a special edict (*Trist.* II. 123-38), in which Ovid was not technically exiled, but relegated; this milder punishment softened the blow for the condemned man's family, and enabled him to retain

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*liceat*; III. 6. 46 *videor*, and IV. 9. 26 *te tegere*).

his property and his citizenship. His poems were banned from the three public libraries in Rome (*Trist.* III. 1).

The second book of the *Tristia*, which consists of a single poem, provides us with further clues to the cause of his exile. There were two counts, the immorality of the *Ars Amatoria* and an unspecified charge. The latter, which of course must be what provoked the summons delivered to him on Elba, will now engage our chief attention. To a large extent the elaborate defense mounted by Ovid in *Tristia* II must therefore beat the air; still, in it Ovid does say (or rather makes Cupid say) that of the two charges (*carmen et error*, v. 207) it is the *error* which has done him the greater harm. Moreover, the mistake was an affront to Augustus himself: *ultus es offensas, ut decet, ipse tuas* (v. 134).

Ovid tells us that he broke no law (*Pont.* II. 9. 71); he did not murder, poison, forge (*Pont.* II. 9. 67 ff.); nor rebel (*Trist.* II. 51); nor conspire, spread scandal, or commit sacrilege (*Trist.* III. 5. 45 ff.). His error brought harm only upon himself and brought him no profit whatever (*Trist.* III. 6. 34). Several times he insists that his error was to have seen a crime,<sup>9</sup> and here I think we are justified in showing a little skepticism. The poet is misleading us, and misleading us in two ways. His statement suggests he was an involuntary bystander — but we have already heard him admit to Cotta Maximus that he was guilty and from Cotta's reaction guilty of a serious crime. Secondly, the story that he saw a crime suggests a single incident (such absurd and preposterous notions that Ovid saw Livia in the nude or Augustus committing an indecent act<sup>10</sup> illustrate — by suggesting a single occasion — the kind of impression that Ovid would have us form). And yet this would seem to be incorrect. In *Trist.* IV. 4 he says: "Even this fault which has ruined me you will deny to be a crime, if you should come to know the whole course of this great evil (*si tanti series sit tibi nota mali*, v. 38)." So the evil of which Ovid is guilty was not committed on one occasion, but had some development, some history.

One last point before we consider possible explanations: can we determine *why* Ovid had to keep silent about his error? Remember that his defense of the *Ars Amatoria* in *Tristia* II. 207 ff. left unanswered the second charge:

Perdiderint cum me duo crimina, carmen et error,  
alterius facti culpa silenda mihi:  
nam non sum tanti, renovem ut tua vulnera, Caesar,  
quem nimio plus est indoluisse semel. (vv. 207-10)

<sup>9</sup>For example *Trist.* II. 103; III. 5. 49-50.

<sup>10</sup>See Thibault (above, note 1), pp. 73-74; 68 ff.

Though two crimes, a poem and a mistake, have ruined me,  
 of my fault in one of them I must keep silent,  
 for I am not worth enough to re-open your wounds, Caesar:  
 for you to have been pained once is once too often.

I have tried earlier to demolish the possible argument that Ovid was in sole or virtually sole possession of some secret. When he said that all Rome knew, he was doubtless exaggerating, but for all his professions of silence over the matter, his poems reveal that at least six of his correspondents knew the details: his wife (*Pont.* III. 1. 147), Messalinus (*Pont.* II. 2. 55-56), Cotta Maximus (*Pont.* II. 3. 85 ff.), Graecinus (*Pont.* II. 6. 5-12), Sextus Pompeius (*Pont.* IV. 15. 25-26), and Fabius Maximus (*Pont.* I. 2. 144). It is hard to credit that knowledge of Ovid's crime was limited to these six persons, harder still to believe that they all held their tongues. Moreover, this is merely to enumerate those who learned the details from Ovid. Augustus on his side will have discussed the affair with his advisers.

We must not forget that the *error* had inflicted pain on Augustus personally; and failing some personal involvement of Ovid with Augustus (which seems not remotely indicated), the only feasible explanation is that some member of Augustus's family was concerned. In confirmation of this we read at *Tristia* III. 4. 1 ff.: "O you who were ever dear to me, but whom I came best to know in the evil hour when my fortunes collapsed, if you trust in aught a friend who has been schooled by experience, live for yourself and flee afar from great names (*vive tibi, et longe nomina magna fuge*)!" So Ovid's connection with great names, that is someone close to Augustus, has led to the collapse of his fortunes.

Turn we now to some members of Augustus's family. His daughter Julia (who had been exiled in 2 B.C.) had by her marriage to Agrippa five children. These had been taken into the house of Augustus and brought up very much as his own: the two eldest, Gaius and Lucius, had been chosen to mark out the line of succession to the principate in preference to Augustus's stepson Tiberius (a matter which keenly rankled with him and largely induced his retirement to Rhodes). But herein Augustus was unlucky, or maybe he pushed the two young men too hard. At any rate they met premature deaths in foreign service. Julia's other children were a daughter of the same name (the Younger Julia), another daughter Agrippina, and a son born a few months after his father's death and appropriately named Agrippa Postumus. On Gaius's death in A.D. 4 Augustus reluctantly abandoned hope of a Julian successor, for he formally adopted Tiberius, making him adopt in turn his nephew Germanicus, thereby marking out



unmistakably the line of succession. Agrippa Postumus was also adopted by Augustus, but without any of those extra marks of favor which might insinuate preferment over Tiberius and Germanicus. And this inferior status Postumus, who was a boy of unruly temper and boorish manners, seems to have resented: he accused his adoptive father of cheating him of his patrimony and kicked up such tantrums that in A.D. 7 Augustus disinherited him and sent him into exile.<sup>11</sup>

The next year (and this of course is A.D. 8, the year of Ovid's relegation) the emperor was further mortified to learn that his granddaughter Julia was no better than her mother: she was convicted of adultery and banished to an island off the coast of Apulia (Tacitus, *Ann.* IV. 71). Her lover, Junius Silanus, got off lightly; he went into voluntary exile and was not further molested (*ibid.* III. 24).

### *Julia's adultery*

The coincidence of dates seems too pointed for one to refrain from making a connection. And I shall at last confess that like many others from the eighteenth century onwards I believe that, aided by his wife's distant connection with the empress Livia and by his social prestige as Rome's greatest living poet, Ovid came to know the princess Julia and, in circumstances we cannot now hope to divine, abetted her adultery with Silanus.<sup>12</sup> Possibly he was manipulated: flattered by her recognition of him he may have entertained her and members of her circle until he could no longer hide from himself what his eyes told him. Whether his house was used as a place of assignation or in some other way he acted as a go-between, he remained silent until all had come out and denial of his complicity was futile. The personal wound he inflicted on Augustus is now readily identifiable, and similarly intelligible is the indictment of the *Ars Amatoria*. The poem alone, however much it annoyed Augustus, cannot have been and on Ovid's own statements was not in itself the chief cause:<sup>13</sup> had it been, Augustus possessed sufficient grounds for taking action against Ovid from the moment it was published. But Ovid's personal involvement transformed the paper delinquencies of his poetry into a more actionable offense; and it is easy to imagine Augustus, when he confronted

<sup>11</sup>Cassius Dio LV. 32. See also Velleius Paterculus 2. 112; Tacitus, *Ann.* I. 3; Suetonius, *Aug.* 65. 4.

<sup>12</sup>The first satisfactory statement was made by Thomas Dyer: "On the Cause of Ovid's Exile," *Classical Museum* 4 (1847), pp. 229-47, still an exemplary account.

<sup>13</sup>As is often alleged, for example by Gaston Boissier, *L'Opposition sous les Césars* (Paris 1875), pp. 112-69, whose explanation of the *error*, however, is sound enough.

Ovid, flying into a rage and accusing him of being a veritable *praeceptor adulterii*. Hence the branding of the poem as well as the banishment of the poet; and, since the instigator of a crime may with justice be held more reprehensible and punished more severely than the actual perpetrator — who, it may be, has merely followed the course advocated to him — we can understand how it is that Augustus treated Ovid so severely and Silanus so lightly. Ovid's reticence about his *error* is also clarified. It would have been in the worst possible taste to expose the sordid details (moreover, he was guilty), and he understandably chose discretion in preference to shaming himself (and shaming Augustus, too). A further point is this: it is not likely that the two counts on which Ovid was condemned were unrelated. If, possessing absolute power, you are minded to inflict summary punishment on a man who has mortally offended you, it hardly makes sense to charge him, for example, with (a) running away with your wife and (b) poisoning your cat ten years earlier. Why mention the second charge at all? On the other hand, had the villain been generally known to have seduced your sister ten years earlier, you might well feel that the addition of that as a second charge would in the public's eyes intensify and further establish his culpability on the first. In two words: if the earlier was the real charge, Augustus would have acted earlier; if it was irrelevant and hence powerless to sustain the *crimen erroris*, Ovid would have contrived to apprise us of the fact.

Syme has several times<sup>14</sup> suggested that the adultery alleged against the younger Julia is fabricated and conceals a political motive; and it is true that the only alternative theory to merit consideration sees Ovid as an unfortunate victim, caught up in a web of intrigue whereby some Julian faction aimed to supplant the Claudians. Immoral conduct is normally alleged, Syme remarks,<sup>15</sup> to disguise a political offense.

I venture to question this unsupported line of speculation. It seems highly improbable that Augustus ever flung an ill-founded charge of adultery at a carrier of his own blood. Not only was he obsessed with the desire of establishing a Julian dynasty, but he repeatedly attempted legislation to invigorate the aristocracy by stabilizing family life and sexual morality: the *Lex Iulia de maritandis ordinibus* and the *Lex Iulia de adulteriis coercendis* both of 18 B.C. were carefully planned measures, and the former act was sufficiently rigorous to compel the mitigation of some of its clauses in the *Lex Papia Poppaea* of A.D. 9.

<sup>14</sup>For example *Roman Revolution* (Oxford 1939), p. 432; *Tacitus* (Oxford 1958) II, p. 404 and n. 1.

<sup>15</sup>Syme (above, note 5), p. 219.

Moreover, in all royal houses, adultery is a very ugly word, and adultery by a female in the direct line of succession is tantamount to treason. In the free and permissive world in which we live it is exceedingly difficult for us to accept double standards of conduct. But that absolute compliance with tradition is required in the house of a hereditary ruler where the line of succession is or may be affected holds true even today. The British Empire was shaken to its foundations when King Edward VIII desired to marry a divorced woman, and Princess Margaret in similar circumstances had to forfeit her personal happiness not many years later, although at about the same time the divorce and re-marriage of the Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, barely made the front page of the newspapers. A recent scandal in Saudi Arabia reinforces the point. A fictionalized version of the incident was televised in Britain and the United States in 1980 and caused diplomatic tempers to flare. The actual events took place three years earlier and concern a Saudi princess, she too a granddaughter, in fact of Mohammed ibn Abdel-Aziz, King Khalid's elder brother and one of the most powerful members of the Saudi royal family. This unhappy modern Julia had been married to Saudi princes and was divorced twice. After leaving Saudi Arabia for Lebanon she studied at the American University of Beirut, where she met her lover. Upon her return to Saudi Arabia, her request to marry him was refused; she was accused and convicted of adultery with a commoner; and on the orders of her grandfather she was executed by a firing squad, whilst her lover was beheaded in a public square.<sup>16</sup>

### *The conspiracy theory*

Let us now look at the alternative theory of conspiracy, which has a number of variations. It is favored by S. G. Owen (in the introduction to his edition of *Tristia* II), Syme, and many others. But there are two sponsors of it who deserve special mention.

The first is the former British poet laureate, John Masefield. In his long poem *A Letter from Pontus* (1936) the narrator is a junior officer on a legate's staff who, on a visit to Tomis, meets Ovid and brings back a letter from him giving his version of the facts: he had found himself in Caesar's palace directing a production of his *Medea*; the leading roles were played by Julia and Silanus, her lover, as Ovid was shocked to discover; hardly had he made the further discovery of a plot to secure the succession for Agrippa Postumus when, now that he was implicated, the plot was betrayed; the rest we know. Frances

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<sup>16</sup>Condensed from *The New York Times*, April 24 (7:1) and April 25 (15:1), 1980.

Norwood's version<sup>17</sup> has no place for the *Medea*, but she too takes a rash leap into the sea of conjecture by having Julia, in scheming for Postumus's return, actually visit him in exile, improbably escorted thither by Ovid, who was brought in under cover of instructing Postumus in literary appreciation. From this implausible *point de départ* she constructs a basis for Ovid's being charged with the immorality of the *Ars Amatoria*.

A new hypothesis of Syme's connects the downfall not only of Julia and Silanus, and of Ovid, but of Julia's husband as well: they were all implicated in a grand conspiracy in A.D. 8.<sup>18</sup> Let us pass over the consideration that in that case adultery was not a plausible charge to trump up against Julia. Still, Syme is right to insist that, since she was accused of adultery, her husband, Lucius Aemilius Paullus, must still have been alive. He is said by Suetonius to have conspired against Augustus and by a garbled scholium on Juvenal (VI. 158) to have been executed for it. But the date of his execution is unspecified; moreover, chronological complications arise from an inscription seemingly fixing his death in A.D. 14 — from which Syme concludes that in A.D. 8 he was not executed at all but simply exiled like Julia and her lover and Ovid.

But it is far from clear that Paullus's downfall is to be assigned to A.D. 8 anyway: this is pure surmise on the part of Syme. On the contrary the Juvenal scholium strongly implies that his punishment preceded Julia's exile, and since in Suetonius (*Aug.* 19) his treason is linked with that of Plautius Rufus, generally identified with the Publius Rufus who in A.D. 6 conspired against Augustus (Dio LV. 27. 2), A.D. 6 would seem to be the date indicated for it. And considerable plausibility is given this view by the arguments of T. D. Barnes,<sup>19</sup> who emphasizes the significance of Augustus's refusal to allow the exiled Julia to rear the child with whom she was pregnant:<sup>20</sup> Augustus plainly believed the child to have been illegitimately conceived, hence the charge of adultery was no false accusation; and this, in turn, means that Julia's husband, Paullus, had long been absent from Rome; finally, it was probably the pregnancy, the visible sign of Julia's condition, hardly to be concealed from the public gaze, that caused the whole scandal to explode.

<sup>17</sup>Frances Norwood, "The Riddle of Ovid's *Relegatio*," *Classical Philology* 58 (1963), pp. 150-63.

<sup>18</sup>Syme (above, note 5), pp. 208 ff.

<sup>19</sup>T. D. Barnes, "Julia's Child," *Phoenix* 35 (1981), pp. 362-63.

<sup>20</sup>Suetonius, *Aug.* 65. 4: *Ex nepte Iulia post damnationem editum infantem agnoscere aliquo vetuit.*

Ovid must have known of Julia's pregnancy when he visited Cotta Maximus on Elba, for his statements in *Trist.* IV. 4 and *Pont.* II. 3 constitute a frank acknowledgment of complicity over a period, irreconcilable with opinions that his mistake was "probably trivial enough"<sup>21</sup> or that all he did was to "attend a party where Julia enjoyed herself with her lover."<sup>22</sup>

### *Junius Silanus*

It is sometimes urged that Ovid's involvement in a pro-Julian plot would better explain the fate of Julia's lover, Junius Silanus. He was, it will be remembered, allowed to go into voluntary exile (and not compelled, like Ovid, to make some distant part of barbarity his permanent abode). Furthermore, on Tiberius's accession, his brother Marcus was able to plead, and plead successfully, for his recall. Here certainly is a difference, but surely one capable of being accounted for.<sup>23</sup> Augustus's special animosity against Ovid is adequately explained by the latter's immoral verse and the pander's role he played, and it may well have been kept alive by his perpetual whining, whereas Silanus, for all his adultery, had the sense to accept exile and keep quiet. By Tiberius's accession, however, Silanus's position had altered: the new emperor had no grudge against him, for after all he had been the means of disgracing and banishing one of the Julian blood and consequentially securing his own succession. Ovid's position had not similarly improved: his poems convict him of being a corrupter, and there is no reason to believe Tiberius took a different view from Augustus.

It is often urged that Ovid's crime was somehow a crime against Tiberius or Livia, and that he knew that the moment Augustus died his cause was lost. At first sight this view might seem to draw support from *Pont.* IV. 6. 15-16 "Augustus had begun to pardon the fault I committed unintentionally; but he has deserted at once my hopes and the world (*spem nostram terras deseruitque simul*)."<sup>24</sup> But only at first sight. This is simply a conventional expression of grief at the death of the emperor, and is naturally heightened by the hypothesis (for which there is not a scrap of evidence) that Augustus was on the point of pardoning him. True, Ovid ceases petitioning soon after Tiberius's accession; but the fact is that he ceases to write altogether about this time. We have nothing of his for the last two or three years of his life and cannot dismiss the possibility that he was incapacitated by a terminal

<sup>21</sup>Syme, *Roman Revolution*, p. 468.

<sup>22</sup>Barnes (above, note 19), p. 363.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. Dyer (above, note 12), p. 246.

illness.

But the *coup de grâce* to the conspiracy theory is dealt by Ovid's denial of it. "I am not accused of following rebellious arms" (*Trist.* II. 51) and "Caesar's life was not sought by me in an attempt to overturn the world" (*Trist.* III. 5. 45) are excuses confidently offered in mitigation of some other charge, and that charge, therefore, cannot be conspiracy.

*Causa peroratast.* Let me conclude at the point from which I started. I prefer as more likely to approximate to the truth the theory which is based on the natural interpretation of the evidence. Julia being exiled for adultery, I shrink from arguing that she was really exiled for something else; and if Ovid was exiled jointly for writing the *Ars Amatoria* and for committing a transgression, again I seek to explain his exile in terms of that joint indictment. Nevertheless, confident as I am of the correctness of the explanation here put forward, I realize that for many it will leave the mystery of Ovid's exile mysterious still, presenting the classical detective with an unsolved puzzle as fresh and challenging as ever.

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